

Afghan donor meeting fails to address mining abuses, warn campaign groups

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A major meeting between the Afghan government and donors in Kabul today is a missed opportunity to act against abuses that have made the country's mining sector a major source of funding for the insurgency and undermined efforts to increase government revenues, Afghan and international campaigning groups warned today.

"The Afghan government has made strong, and very welcome, statements of its intention to fight the abuses which have so far made mining a curse and not a blessing for the Afghan people," said Ikram Afzali, the head of Integrity Watch Afghanistan, one of the key Afghan civil society organisations working on extractives. "It is all the more disappointing that this critical meeting has not produced a single significant commitment to action – especially when there are so many basic safeguards which have yet to be put in place."

The Senior Officials Meeting (SOM) held today in Kabul was called to set benchmarks for both the government and donors as part of the Self-reliance through Mutual Accountability Framework (SMAF). At the December 2014 London Afghanistan Conference which preceded the SOM, the Afghan government committed to putting in place the "strongest possible available measures, based on international best practice, to counter the threat of conflict and corruption around the extractive industries."

Along with a group of Afghan civil society organisations, Integrity Watch Afghanistan and Global Witness had called on the Afghan government to use the SOM meeting to set out a road-map for reform, including standard protections which are increasingly routine parts of international best practice. The most important of these include amending the mining law itself to require publication of contracts, of project-level payment and production data, and of the real, 'beneficial' owners of mining companies; and to create a framework for community monitoring of mining.

Stephen Carter, Afghanistan team leader at Global Witness, said: "We understand the Afghan government is facing many challenges, and fixing the mining sector will take time. But these are straightforward measures, which make limited demands on the Afghan government but could have real impact in reducing the major threat of conflict and corruption around mining."

The lack of significant commitments on mining is especially concerning given that the sector is almost unique in its potential to fuel economic growth and development and make Afghanistan more self-sufficient, Carter added: "If the government and donors do not act decisively on measures to prevent the massive loss of revenue from what should be one of the mainstays of the Afghan economy, it inevitably calls into question how serious they are about safeguarding their taxpayers' money and moving Afghanistan away from a reliance on international aid."

But a more important test than the SOM will be the amendments to the Mining Law, which the Afghan Ministry of Mines is currently working on, the two campaign groups said. "The government still has every chance to fulfil the historic pledges it has made, if it puts these safeguards directly into the Mining Law" Afzali said. "In the end, whatever commitments the government makes or does not make, what matters is whether it acts."

NOTES FOR EDITORS:

- For a full briefing note on the SOM and extractives issues, see: <https://www.globalwitness.org/campaigns/afghanistan/extractives-sustainable-development-afghanistan/>
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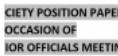
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